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ABSTRACT

The Program for Learning Competent Teaching is an on-site, preservice teacher training program sponsored by the Northern Arizona University's Center for Excellence in Education that attempts to incorporate more of the complexities of teaching than is possible in traditional on-campus lecture classes. The program is a cooperative effort of the university center and Flagstaff Public Schools. Fourteen credits of integrated reading, language arts, and field work are included in the program, which meets four hours daily. The program is conducted in a self-contained laboratory facility adjacent to an elementary school. Students study four program components: (1) academic content; (2) methods content; (3) teaching skills; and (4) personal development. First-year program evaluation indicated positive student gains in academic learning, teaching competencies, self-confidence, dedication, and teamwork and professionalism. (CB)

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Program For Learning Competent Teaching

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PROGRAM FOR LEARNING COMPETENT TEACHING

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A Cooperative Venture of Northern Arizona University's
Center for Excellence in Education and Flagstaff Public Schools

ABSTRACT

The Program for Learning Competent Teaching is an on-site, preservice, teacher training program located at Christensen Elementary School in Flagstaff, Arizona and sponsored by the Center for Excellence in Education. Twenty-eight undergraduate students, mostly sophomores and juniors, are enrolled in fourteen credits of integrated reading/language arts/field work. They are in attendance from 8:00 to 12:00 daily, Monday through Friday.

Approximately two hours each morning the students attend lectures and seminars or study and prepare lessons within an on-site mobile unit which serves as our classroom/laboratory. For the other two hours the students work in an assigned classroom, two per classroom. At the end of eight weeks the students are assigned a different partner and supervising teacher. Students who work in a primary room the first eight weeks are transferred to an intermediate grade room the second eight weeks, and vice versa.

This program is somewhat of a synthesis of many others before it, but we believe it has some unique features which will allow it to become part of a much more extensive system for training preservice teachers. Evaluation is competency-based, coursework is integrated, eliminating overlap and redundancies, and our students test teaching strategies and apply the skills of teaching in a natural environment--the elementary classroom. Lectures and seminars conducted by the faculty team are supplemented and enriched by presentations from teachers and school administrators and from resource people in business, government, the sciences, and the arts.

The Program for Learning Competent Teaching is a cooperative effort, with all of the potential and pitfalls inherent in cooperative ventures. We do not feel this program is a perfect model for all programs, but we do feel it is a beginning for incorporating more of the complexities of teaching into a training program than is possible in traditional on-campus lecture classes.

PROGRAM FOR LEARNING COMPETENT TEACHING

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PROGRAM OVERVIEW AND DESCRIPTION

The Program For Learning Competent Teaching is a cooperative venture of Northern Arizona University's Center for Excellence in Education and the Flagstaff Public Schools. The Center for Excellence in Education is a teacher education institution born out of the university's former College of Education. Its developing curriculum is based upon the following:

The curriculum will

1. be competency-based;
2. combine theory with practice;
3. have a large component of experiences in actual school settings early in the program;
4. use educational technology extensively;
5. be visionary.

The Program for Learning Competent Teaching is the prototype for the new curriculum. The program combines all language arts and reading coursework into integrated curriculum for students of elementary teacher education, and delivers this coursework within the context of an elementary school environment. Students earn fourteen credit hours, attending classes and teaching in classrooms on-site at the elementary school from 8:00 A.M. to noon, five days a week for one semester. Two NAU students work in each participating classroom, teaming closely with the teacher. Students spend eight weeks working in a primary grade and eight weeks at an intermediate grade level. All teachers and the on-site directors meet once each week to evaluate, plan, and brainstorm.

Distinctives of the Program

The following aspects of the program are unique, and contribute to the efficiency and power of the project:

1. The program is totally on-site, in a self-contained laboratory facility adjacent to an elementary school. Students study and prepare in the lab (a 12' x 40' trailer) and then go into the school to teach their daily lessons to elementary schoolchildren.

2. Classroom teaching applications are carried out within a carefully-planned structure. NAU students are accountable for children's learning. Their lessons must fit the classroom program, the district curriculum, and the daily schedule of the school.
3. All University-level course content in the teaching of reading and language arts is integrated, thus eliminating redundancies and overlap. The curriculum program, composed of eight modules, covers the entire semester. A copy of one of the two-week modules is included in the Appendix.
4. Students are recruited during their Sophomore year. This is important because they need to test the waters of teaching as early as possible in their University career.
5. The program is competency-based, requiring the NAU students to show their grasp of academic background, methods content, teaching skills, and professional behaviors within the context of actually planning and teaching lessons in the elementary classroom. A list of all competencies and performance indicators is included in the Appendix.
6. School-university teamwork is strong. Members of the Center faculty team are at the school every day, actively teaching, observing, and solving problems. Monday afternoon seminars with Center faculty and teachers help everyone communicate and plan together. Teachers also conduct seminars for NAU students while their classes are covered by University personnel.

PROGRAM GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Program goals and objectives are taken directly from four program components.

Academic Content. The goal is that all students will equal or surpass the academic learning of the students on campus as measured by comparing the results of objective test scores from the two groups. Objectives were developed by taking the competencies from those developed for on-campus courses, plus those added by the two program directors.

Methods Content. The goal is that students will learn and be proficient in the use of a variety of methods. Objectives are specific methods. Methods and teaching

strategies are taught to all of the students in the lectures and seminars. Such generic methods can then be evaluated objectively with paper and pencil tests. However, the need for many more methods arises from the students' day-to-day teaching and the challenges they face individually in their classroom assignments.

Skills of Teaching. The goal is that all students will master the ten competencies and fifty descriptors developed by the program teachers and directors. Because mastery of the skills involved in the process of teaching occur with various degrees of understanding and proficiency, these goals and objectives are individualized for each student.

Personal Development. Both the goals and objectives for this component are personal for each student. The instructor's goal is student growth. To some extent, the instructors determine objectives because they choose most of the personal development seminar topics, but within the topic each student must select his/her own objective. The only common goal demanded by teachers and program directors is that each student be considered as a professional and behave accordingly.

THE PROCESS OF PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

With a cooperative program in which professors and classroom teachers have the major responsibilities and the goal is preservice training, a number of potential challenges exist:

1. Both groups must work within the schools' administrative framework.
2. The professors are primarily responsible for university student training and behavior.
3. The classroom teachers' primary responsibility is to the children and school.

Mr. Dave McKay, the principal in charge of the elementary school where the above program is housed, has been an interested participant. He and his vice-principal have worked closely with the district's administration, all of the teachers, and the university personnel. His leadership has been invaluable in correcting and avoiding many problems.

The two professors directing this program have had a team approach from the beginning. Each one has assumed the part of responsibilities which best suited his/her past experiences and interests. Since this program was started with no prior preparation time for the professors, all of the planning and implementation took place under the strain of immediate need. Fortunately, the planning was thorough enough that no major unforeseen problems developed.

From the syllabi for the five courses included in the block a comprehensive list of competencies was developed. These competencies provided the core of the content taught in daily lectures and seminars in the trailer which housed the NAU students.

Students worked in the classroom to which they were assigned. They were responsible for preparing lesson plans and teaching children. Often methods and materials were learned as a result of the teaching needs, as well as being learned from prepared lectures and seminars. Although lesson plans were checked by the professors, teachers had the responsibility for setting the environment where those lessons could be successfully taught by the student. Formal teaching of different methods and academic content was the responsibility of the professors, but much informal learning occurred as a result of classroom teachers' work.

Helping students learn teaching skills was a time consuming and difficult task. The two professors and the fourteen cooperating teachers developed a list of ten basic teaching competencies with five examples for each competency. This instrument, titled "Teaching Competencies," served as an evaluation checklist and as a teaching/learning checklist.

Personal Development was the title for the "fun" part of the program. Twenty speakers came to the trailer and school. Topics were extremely diverse, such as: personal grooming tips, relaxation techniques, time management, teaching culture with puppets, etc. Some notable speakers were "loaned" to the program, such as: Roach Van Allen, Neil Postman, and Wilson Riles. Most of the other guest speakers were local professors, administrators, teachers.

Developing student self-image was an important concern of the professors. The professors assumed that student self-image would be enhanced only through successful accomplishments. In all cases, except evaluation of academic knowledge, students were compared only to themselves and helped to improve. Many times areas targeted for improvement were jointly determined by students, professors, and teachers.

Evaluation was difficult, as it always is in complex situations. Academic evaluation was easier, and in part accomplished with objective academic tests developed to compare the on-site students with those on campus. Actual statistical comparisons will not take place until the Fall semester of 1986. The teaching methods and their implementation were evaluated informally by teachers and professors. Personal development was self-evaluated. General skills of teaching were evaluated by students, teachers and professors. A unique in-basket evaluation, based upon actual classroom situations, was developed as a result of studying business practices. This approach appears to have a great deal of potential.

Results from the program far exceeded expectations. All twenty-eight students developed acceptably, although one decided not to become a teacher. They felt they had worked much harder and longer hours than if they had been on-campus but they all expressed great appreciation for the learning and self-confidence acquired.

All fourteen classroom teachers involved in the program were given three graduate credits. They took an active part in supervising their students' teaching and related activities. All teachers attended a planning/learning session once each week. At the session, plans for the coming week were discussed, along with problems, ideas, and issues. At the end of the semester, most of the teachers were very enthusiastic about continuing. A few did not want to continue. The common concern was the amount of time and effort required. The teachers who chose to return did so because of professional commitment and personal development. The school district granted each teacher one day's leave to visit other classrooms or schools.

Although the program is being considered an unqualified success, it requires a high level of sustained effort and cooperation. Possibilities for changes in traditional university pre-service curricula and university-public school relationships based on variations of this model appear extensive.

EVALUATION DESIGN AND METHODS OF ANALYSIS: THE FIRST SEMESTER'S EXPERIENCE

The evaluation system for NAU students consisted of:

1. Academic testing, using multiple-choice and essay formats similar to on-campus courses. These will be compared with students in the on-campus program.
2. Pre- and post-tests for each of the eight modules in the program. These tests were graded by the students themselves. They kept records of their scores in their own files.
3. Anecdotal records, kept by students in their files, noting lectures and seminars attended, readings they had done, and the triumphs and challenges of the week.
4. Competency and Performance Indicator checklists, for students to keep track of competencies and performance indicators achieved each week.
5. "In-basket" activities, developed in consultation with AT&T.
6. Weekly lesson plans, prepared by students in advance, and critiqued by Center faculty in individual conferences with each student.

7. Periodic evaluation conferences held with classroom teachers, student teams, and Center faculty.
8. Videotaping and classroom observation of teaching, followed up by individual conferences between students and Center faculty.
9. Friday Reflections, written anonymously by each student and turned in as a post-script to each week. These reflections were personal, open, frank, reactions to the week's stresses and successes.
10. A Final Reflection, required from each student, wherein each individual described the changes that they felt had occurred for them, both cognitively and affectively, during the semester.

Presently, in the second semester of this program, objective pre- and post-tests are being given to all students enrolled in the reading/language arts method courses. A series of T tests will be run to determine if there is a significant difference in learning. The same kind of comparison will be made with an attitudinal survey.

Evaluation systems for teachers, elementary students, and the school:

Evaluation of the effect of our program upon the life of the school took the following forms:

1. Building Principal Dave McKay held group meetings and individual conferences with teachers to discuss problems and attitudes toward the program. These meetings were frank and open.
2. Center faculty met with each teacher individually on several occasions, to discuss the impact of the program on that teacher's classroom.
3. Teachers were asked to participate in the development of an evaluation format for our NAU students' teaching. The format was designed for teachers and Center faculty to use in evaluating the NAU students. This project brought about much discussion among the teachers about the role of evaluation and supervision in teaching.
4. At the end of the semester, teachers were asked to write reflections about the experience--what it had meant to them personally and professionally.

RESULTS OF THE EVALUATION

By May of 1986 objective results will be available comparing students in this program with on-campus students in academic learning and attitudes towards teaching and preservice training. Most of the evaluation was qualitative, personal, and based in reality. Globally, we can make the following observations about outcomes for our students:

1. Students were successful in their academic learning and their teaching competencies, far beyond their expectations and our own.
2. Students gained a clear-eyed view of their potential as teachers.
3. Students' self-concepts and sense of personal power were enhanced.
4. Students emerged from the experience more idealistic, altruistic, and dedicated to teaching than when they went in.
5. Teamwork, sharing, and professionalism were learned naturally.

In summary, we determined that our presence in the school had some tangible effects:

1. Teachers who made the most of the enthusiasm and expertise of the NAU students assigned to them felt that they had gained benefits in terms of small-group instruction, remedial and enrichment activities, bulletin boards, learning centers, and specially-made games for their students.
2. Teachers became more aware of their role as professionals, accepting responsibility for helping develop the skills of aspiring teachers.
3. NAU student enthusiasm was evident in the school, and teachers and administrators appreciated our students' presence at PTO meetings and other non-required activities.
4. A steady stream of visitors, dignitaries, and media people through the school brought visibility and positive publicity for the school.

POTENTIAL FOR ADOPTION OR ADAPTATION BY OTHER INSTITUTIONS

This program can be adopted by any group with the same purposes and goals. The tremendous potential of this program, however, is that it can be adapted to other goals in teacher education. This particular program is designed to include competencies from language arts, reading, and children's literature courses taught on-campus, but other methods courses would work just as well.

The Flagstaff School District administrators, from the beginning, saw this program as a way to maintain and develop professional interest in the district. They took complete initiative in explaining procedures, involvement, and goals to their Board of Trustees. The building principal and assistant principal were active participants from the beginning. Mutual enthusiasm and goals were essentials. As a result of administrative teamwork, minor problems never developed into major problems.

Although the tone was established by the administrators and program directors, the teachers willingly accepted their roles. All teachers were volunteers. Most of the teachers accepted the work and responsibilities because of their desire to see the

profession improved through the improvement of preservice programs. Without such a high level of professionalism on the part of teachers, this program would not work (unless other kinds of compensation could be implemented). Teachers worked very hard, but most of them did choose to be included in a second semester.

Historically, burnout has been a major problem for on-site programs--burnout of administrators, teachers, and university directors. Probably one major key to solving the problem is the teamwork of directors. They must have common goals and be compatible team members, day after day. Each must be willing to accept a share of the work, because time management can be a major problem. Many on-site decisions must be made "on the spot." Anyone choosing directors for such a program must take compatability and background of team members into account.

Although this program can be adopted as it is, its greatest potential is that it can be adapted to a variety of goals, purposes, course content, and school district needs. Flexibility is built into the framework of the system.

Implications and Conclusions

In the final analysis, a program is effective only if it touches and changes people in some way. We have evidence that this happened, not only for our students, but also for the teachers and the elementary children who participated with us.

For the program to continue to grow and flourish, however, several issues need consideration:

1. The intense supervision and involvement of Center faculty on-site must continue. (So-called "field-based" programs sponsored by other Universities have failed because they lacked the constant presence and professional involvement of school-wise University faculty.) The implication is that the issue of FTE and faculty load must be examined and resources reallocated to support programs of this nature.
2. Because we must depend upon the schools for our laboratory, it is vital that the program have a good effect upon the school. There must be benefits for the classroom teacher, the children, the school, and the district. Therefore, a strong partnership must be drawn between the Center and the school district, with shared priorities, goals, and support.
3. Success of the program, ultimately, depends to a great extent upon the classroom teachers with whom our students team. We must have opportunity to select the very best teacher models for our students to emulate. Therefore, there must be some sort of professional recognition or reward system for these individuals, so that the role of "field-based

teacher educator" is looked upon as a professional plus. (Commitment of time, energy, and patience is extremely heavy for the teachers who participate in the program.)

4. Evaluation of the program must be long-range as well as short-range. Students who participate in the on-site block experiences should be followed into their student teaching and into their teaching positions, to determine the effects of the program upon their teaching successes and problems. This work requires resources and support, but it provides rich research opportunities for Center faculty and graduate students. All evaluation tools must be upgraded and adapted as the program grows and changes. Much work needs to be done, for example, in defining the parameters of truly competent teaching.

5. Time is a major consideration. Integrating University coursework into blocks is efficient. The structure eliminates overlap. Academic information and methods are learned almost on the "first bounce" because opportunities to apply the knowledge are immediate and challenging for our students. At the same time, however, because of the constantly-expanding classroom responsibilities of our students as the semester progressed, and because of the necessity to adjust, almost daily, to the school's schedules, we found ourselves in a crunch for time, even to deliver the course content in its stripped down version. We also wanted to do more in the areas of ESL, Bilingual and Multicultural Education, and the teaching of Special Needs students in the regular classroom.

   The implication here is that we need to expand our block programs and revise schedules accordingly. This means that we must exercise more control over our students' programs of studies from the time they enter as Freshmen, so these big blocks of time can be allocated in advance.

6. A final point is that although we have a promising model for improving teacher education, that model requires that Center faculty who coordinate the program must themselves demonstrate strong teaching and teamwork. They must know their academic background and methods content so well that they can share their knowledge with students in flexible situations, teaching "on-demand" as changing situations require. In addition, these individuals must be school-wise, understanding how schools and classrooms function. Their teaming must be natural and done by choice, if the program is to succeed. Our team had these attributes and opportunities. We enjoyed the work, and our students reaped the benefits.

Summary

Our first two semesters' experience with the integrated on-site reading and language arts program was successful. We all accomplished a great deal, and learned something new every day. We were able to do this because of the support of Flagstaff schools and of the administration of the Center for Excellence in Education. A key element was the teamwork we enjoyed with classroom teachers and building administrators at Christensen Elementary School.

Finally, we must keep the concept foremost in our minds that teaching is an art. It is not a discrete collection of performance indicators, check-list evaluation items, or test scores. It is highly personal, intensely social, creative work. Our programs must model the art and skill of teaching, because . . .

> . . . it is the behavior of teachers in classrooms that will finally determine whether or not our schools meet or fail to meet the challenge of our time.
>
> --Arthur Combs